



THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL LAW REFORMS ON VOTERS' TURNOUT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA COUNTRIES

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Cite this article:

David Olusanjo (2025), The Impact of Electoral Law Reforms on Voters' Turnout in Sub-Saharan Africa Countries. African Journal of Law, Political Research and Administration 8(1), 85-101. DOI: 10.52589/AJLPRA-FZC5FP5Q

Manuscript History

Received: 16 Dec 2024

Accepted: 8 Feb 2025

Published: 17 Feb 2025

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ABSTRACT: *How and to what extent does electoral law reform influence voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries? To address this question, this study aims to empirically investigate the impact of electoral law reform on voter turnout using panel data and cross-national evidence from sub-Saharan African countries. The central argument is that electoral law reform that includes easy registration of voters and reducing barriers to political participation measured through the introduction of biometric voter registration and verification system to enhance the integrity and efficiency of elections leads to increased voter turnout in African countries. While the results from the regression analysis of panel data did not support the hypothesis that electoral law reform leads to increased voter turnout, the qualitative case studies provide evidence on factors that occasion decreased voter turnout post-electoral reform.*

KEYWORDS: Election; Reform; Voter turnout; Electoral System Design; Sub-Saharan Africa.



INTRODUCTION

Most voters are required to register prior to an election to prove that they are eligible to vote. This prerequisite makes casting a ballot a more troublesome demonstration than it, in any case, would be. Citizens must not only care enough to go to the polls but also register earlier to save time and effort. Indeed, registering is frequently more challenging than voting. To complete a more straightforward procedure, which may necessitate a longer journey at a less convenient time and at a time when campaign interest is far from its peak (Rosenstone & Wolfinger, 1978). These scholars' accounts reinforce the need and study of electoral reforms and their implication on voter turnout.

Electoral reform has been unmistakable in African governmental issues since the 'third wave' of a democratization spread across the African continent in the mid-1990s (Huntington 1991). From that point forward, a few nations have made changes to voter registration and electing framework plans; introduced gender quotas and other affirmative action policies to increase participation among typically underrepresented groups, such as young people, the disabled, and ethnic minorities; achieved and revised legitimate structures overseeing party and campaign finance and out-of-country casting a ballot; and, changed the regulation to prepare for the utilization of new advancements. In addition, a few nations have amended laws pertaining to electoral commissions themselves, such as their independence, composition, appointment of members, and functions. According to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the following African countries have at different periods introduced electoral law reforms. They include Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Liberia, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Malawi, Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Seychelles, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe.

This study investigates the impact of electoral law reforms on voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. Electoral law reforms are often undertaken with the aim of enhancing democratic processes, ensuring fairness, and increasing participation in elections. However, the effectiveness of these reforms in achieving higher voter turnout remains unclear, particularly in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between electoral law reforms and voter turnout in this region.

To explore this question, I examined the sub-Saharan African experience of voter turnout over the past three decades (1990 - 2023), using panel data from different sources based on presidential elections with individual elections as a unit of analysis. The study hypothesized that electoral law reform that includes easy registration of voters and reducing barriers to political participation measured through the introduction of biometric voter registration and verification system to enhance the integrity and efficiency of elections leads to increased voter turnout in African countries. Unlike previous cross-national studies, it aims to assess the effect of the presidential formula, the presence or absence of an incumbent presidential candidate, and corruption to identify the key factors influencing voters' decision to participate or abstain from voting.

Given that the effectiveness of electoral reforms in achieving higher voter turnout remains unclear, particularly in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the study contributes to the existing literature by testing the impact of electoral reform and voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. The findings advance the existing knowledge on electoral reform and voter turnout by providing empirical evidence about the effectiveness of electoral reform in increasing voter



turnout in Africa. This research is pertinent to giving insight into the influence of electoral reform on voters' turnout in sub-Saharan Africa given the introduction of biometric voters' registration in the region.

The paper is structured in the following manner. The first section examines existing research on electoral reform while the succeeding section highlights the main concept or themes in the research such as electoral reform and voters' turnout as well as the interconnection between electoral reform and voters' turnout from previous studies, including the motivations or goals behind reform from African context. The subsequent section presents the research design and results from bivariate analyses and regression models while controlling for other variables. On completion of the analysis, I presented qualitative evidence that provided explanations on probable multi-faceted factors that occasioned decreased voters turnout post-electoral reform in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Uganda,

LITERATURE REVIEW

Electoral Reform: A Growing Phenomenon

There is a plethora of literature on electoral reforms in different regions of the world. According to Leyenaar & Hazan (2011), the literature on electoral reform may be broadly categorized into three waves of development. The first is the study of non-reform, the second includes the study of major reforms and their political consequences with emphasis on a single case study (1990s to the mid-2000s) while the third constitutes a more comprehensive approach to the study of electoral reform (mid-2000)

Norri's (1995) work explores the politics of electoral reform in Britain which calls the long-established first-past-the-post into question. In her work, she argued about the unavailability of binding provisions on referendum while the opposition remains polarized about the suitable or apt alternative. She concluded that the possibilities of reform are uncertain in Britain. Gherghina, Stefan and Chiru (2013) equally studied the disposition of Romanian MPs to the electoral system change. Drawing from the original parliamentary survey, their work focused on what motivates MPs elected under a closed proportional representation (PR) to consider transforming this electoral system. Moreover, their study revealed that MPs were willing to change to a single-member district from closed-list PR when they realized latent benefit for themselves or their parties. Ehrhard & Passard's (2020) seminal work examined the politics of electoral system choice in the context of democratization, with a great emphasis on electoral reform and institutional change in the French Third Republic (1870-1940). Their empirical work showed that though political incumbents attempt to protect their power with the electoral system, electoral reform most times abdicates in actualizing their original objectives. In my view, the work of Ehrhard & Passard (2020) not only exhibits weakness in electoral reform but is considered a strong instrument wielded by the political class to safeguard their self-serving interests and political aggrandizement.

Several studies have been done on the electoral system and democratization in Africa. Reynolds (1999) focuses on Southern Africa with special attention on 5 countries (South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi). His work adopted an eclectic approach, qualitative and analysis of electoral outcomes, including electoral results under a different voting arrangement. Utilizing data on vote statistics from Rwanda's 2003 and 2015



constitutional referenda, Seburanga & Gatesire, (2016) argues that the result from the referenda not only showed contrasting changes in voter turnout between diaspora and in-country electorate but also supported suggestions that the Tutsi electorate stands more divided than the previous decade.

Electoral Reform and Voters Turnout

In connecting electoral reform to voter participation, the influential work of (Briebe & Bunker, 2019) aptly captured voter equalization and turnout bias after reform with evidence from Chile's voluntary voting law. The scholar argued that in cases where compulsory voting did not guarantee or culminate in absolute voter participation, switching to voluntary voting would increase inequalities. Their studies revealed that ditching mandatory voting does not increase turnout bias given that much depends on the configuration of the electoral institution as well as the structure of previous bias.

Relatively, Berinsky (2005) examined the perverse consequences of electoral reform in the United States. Drawing largely from numerous studies on electoral reform within the United States, the work demonstrated reforms targeted towards easy registration of voters to cast their ballot increase, instead of reducing, socio-economic biases in the constitution of the voting public. The author concluded with a suggestion of electoral reform that will be oriented towards political engagement rather than institutional changes. In addition, popular reform, measured as early voting, decreases turnout when implemented by itself while election-day registration has a consistently positive effect on turnout (Burden, Canon, Mayer, and Moynihan, 2014)

Definitions of Electoral Reform

The term electoral reform has been elusive to a straitjacket or unanimous definition. Electoral reform is seen as a fundamental component of democratic development. In wide terms, electoral reform is embraced to work on the electoral process by advancing the franchise rights of citizens and by operationalizing key standards like fairness, comprehensiveness, straightforwardness, uprightness, and precision (IDEA, 2014).

According to Norris (1995), electoral reform is historically considered a term that borders on many issues that range from the removal of electoral corruption to increased voting rights and reallocation of constituent boundaries. In her observations, she remarked that so many questions emerged from the discourse of electoral reform. Some of these include the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission, regulation of the political coverage space, public financial support of party campaign activities and advancement in the facilities for voting and registering.

According to Butler (2004), electoral reforms are modifications to the electoral system aimed at enhancing public preferences. To him, such changes might happen in either the democratic and counting processes, rules administering ideological groups, polling form configuration, casting ballot packs, how ideological groups and their up-and-comers might challenge decisions, security of political race authorities and citizens, measures against discretionary extortion, subsidizing of competitors, as well as a modification in political decision regulations. For the purposes of this study, electoral reform could be defined as the improvement of an existing system's efficiency and effectiveness of the introduction of fair electoral processes and procedures in areas where they do not currently exist.



To Arowolo (2013), there are 3 domains of electoral reform which include the political domain, legal domain, and administrative domain. To him, the political domain incorporates the need to guarantee that the political field is favourable with open interaction that gives a level battleground to all competitors, to such an extent that it will oblige more residents to partake unafraid of terrorizing. Altering the electoral act, constitution, and other laws governing the conduct of elections are included in the legal domain, while determining the nature of the election, such as funding, polling form creation; the election schedule; enlistment and preparing of INEC and other specially appointed staff; registering as a voter; innovation-based casting a ballot are included in the administrative domain.

The handbook on electoral management design (2014a) published by International IDEA divides electoral reforms into political, administrative, and legal categories. Changes to the political environment that an Electoral Management Body (EMB) operates, such as reforms that grant EMBs more autonomy, are referred to as political electoral reform. Administrative reform includes changes that are connected more to the everyday work of an EMB, like the presentation of new procedures, approaches, and designs. Finally, the term "legal electoral reform" broadly encompasses amendments to the constitution, electoral laws, and regulations. In addition, electoral law reform investigates making changes to election-related laws and constitutional provisions. These laws include laws about elections but also laws about political parties, the media, and other things that are closely linked to elections.

Electoral Reform in Africa: Increasing Turnout or Easing Registration Process?

One of the crucial questions to ask on the goal or motivations of electoral reform in Africa is whether they are targeted towards increasing voter turnout or easing registration and ensuring inclusivity. For instance, in Ghana, the Electoral Commission received concerns from individuals, civil society organizations, political parties, and other electoral stakeholders regarding the necessity of adopting new reforms to solve the problems associated with the electoral system to promote transparent and credible elections (Oquaye, 2012; CODEO, 2012). The biometric voting system, which consisted of two sections, was introduced by the Electoral Commission on March 24, 2012: the registration and verification of biometric voters (CODEO, 2013; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017). This change was basically anticipated to beat the significant difficulties related to the conventional citizen enrollment and confirmation framework (CDD-Ghana 2012).

Also, the citizens' voting list utilized in Zimbabwe's 2013 elections contained many names of dead individuals and twofold registrants and was defaced by the under-enlistment of youthful voters. To resolve these issues the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) used biometric voter registration (BVR) innovation to make a totally new citizens' register ahead of the general elections. The election authority was able to identify duplicate registrants and remove them from the voter's register thanks to the BVR method, which digitized voters' fingerprints (ZESN, 2013). It is evident that the electoral reform in Ghana and Zimbabwe is not geared towards increasing turnout but ensuring transparency in the elections.

In a press statement issued by the Republic of Uganda Electoral Commission in 2016, the commission introduced the use of a Biometric Voter Verification System (BVVS) which is aimed at improving the integrity of the electoral process through the authentication of voter identity and preventing ineligible persons from voting (Kiggundu, 2016). Similarly, in a press statement issued by the Kenyan Electoral Commission, biometric voter verification was



introduced to improve the accuracy of the register of voters and to deliver free, fair, and credible elections (Chebukati, 2017). The evidence from Uganda and Kenya show that electoral reform is implemented mainly to ensure the integrity and credibility of elections rather than to increase voter turnout. Another example is Cameroon Legislative and Municipal Elections (ELECAM) which introduced biometric registration and voters' cards in 2012. To the commission, the goal of the reform is to help reduce some voting irregularities rather than increase voter turnouts (Rahman, 2013).

In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission introduced the Biometric Voter's Verification to produce a credible register of voters and reduced malpractices such as fraud and multiple registrations (Iwu, 2007). The electoral reform in Nigeria and Cameroon reinforces that most electoral reform in the cases selected, and by extension, Africa are aimed at ensuring credibility and eliminating multiple registrations, instead of increasing voters' turnout.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Hypothesis

Electoral law reform that includes easy registration of voters and reducing barriers to political participation measured through the introduction of biometric voter registration and verification system to enhance the integrity and efficiency of elections leads to increased voter turnout in African countries

Cases

Yurdasen (2022) states that about 25 African countries have either already implemented or plan to implement biometric voting systems. You can see Appendix 1 for the list of the 25 countries. Of all the countries identified, I did country-by-country research on those that have laws to back up this reform and have conducted at least one election post-reform. This process determines my case selection and enables me to assess the impact of electoral reform on voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries after its introduction. Additionally, it allows me to compare rates of voter turnout before and after the introduction of reform, in time series and control for other factors at the macro-level. Given the lack of clarity and unavailability of electoral law on reforms, including the absence of post-reform elections from 13 out of the 25 countries, I selected 12 countries that have clear electoral laws and have held at least one election post-reform for my cases. Table 1 contains the countries and their electoral law.

Country	Electoral Act
Zimbabwe	Section 21(7) of the Electoral Amendment Act (2018)
Uganda	Electoral Commission Act of 1997 (as amended) in January 2016.
Nigeria	Electoral Act Amendment 2010
Kenya	Section 6A (i) of the Elections Act 2017 (Amendment)
Ghana	Ghana's 1992 Constitution in Article 45 (a) and (f) empowers Electoral Commission to make reform. The Electoral Commission introduced the biometric on 24th March 2012 voting system.
Namibia	The 2014 Namibian Electoral Act



Togo	2020 Togo Electoral Code
DRC Congo	Congo Electoral Law (Amended) 2016
Zambia	The Electoral Commission of Zambia Act No 25, 2016
Cameroon	The new unified Electoral Code adopted in 2012
Sierra Leone	Public Election Act, 2012
Niger	Introduced in 2020

Table: 1 Countries and Electoral Law Reform**Source: Compiled by the Author**

Country	Years of Election included
Cameroon	1992, 1997, 2004, 2011, 2018 ,
Congo	2006, 2011, 2018 ,
Ghana	1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020
Namibia	1994, 1999, 2004, 2014, 2019
Niger	1993, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2011, 2016, 2021
Nigeria	1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, 2023
Kenya	1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2013, 2017, 2022
Sierra Leone	1996, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2018, 2023
Togo	1998, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020
Uganda	1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021
Zambia	1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2021
Zimbabwe	1996, 2002, 2008, 2013, 2018

Table 2: African Countries and their Years of Election**Source: Compiled by the Author**

The shaded election years represent the elections that were conducted after the adoption/introduction of reform while the unshaded indicate pre-electoral reform elections.

Dependent Variable

Voters Turnout

One of the most important measures of how citizens participate in their nation's governance is voter turnout. In most cases, a higher voter turnout indicates the vitality of democracy, whereas a lower turnout typically indicates voter apathy and mistrust of the political process (Solijonovo 2016). There are two ways of measuring voters' turnout from comparative turnout literature: (1) Voter turnout as the percentage of registered voters that turn out (RV turnout) and voter turnout as the percentage of a country's voting-age population that cast their votes on election day (VAP turnout) (Stockemer, 2017). While both measurements were criticized for lacking precision, the former was faulted for overestimating turnouts, and the latter was remarked for either overestimating or underestimating turnouts.

The proportion of registered voters who participated in a particular national election is the dependent variable, turnout. Powell (1982), Jackman (1987) and Lijphart (1997) measure



turnout as a level of the qualified populace, while Franklin (1999) and Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) express it as a level of those enlisted to cast a ballot because all eligible voters in cases selected in sub-Saharan African countries are listed on the government's registration lists. For this study, I adopted the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance measurement of voters' turnout and equally obtained data on voters' turnout for the countries selected. The number of people who were registered to vote in an election as reported by the national EMB and the actual number of people who voted in an election as reported by the national EMB, including invalid and blank votes. The total vote is divided by the estimated voting-age population and presented in percentage terms (IDEA, 2018).

Independent Variable

Presidential Electoral Formular

The two most renowned presidential electoral formulas globally are plurality and majority run-off (Blais, Massicotte, and Dobrzynska 1997). In the plurality formula, otherwise known as first-past-the-post, the candidate who gets the highest votes in the elections wins and becomes the president under this category. In the majority run-off presidential formula, the presidential candidate is expected to win 50% + 1 of the valid votes in the election in the first round, if no candidate gets the 50%, the first two runner up, that is, the two candidates with the most votes go through the second round.

Electoral Law Reform

The next independent variable is electoral law reform, that is, whether a country introduced electoral law reforms or not. Electoral reform has been a subject of scholarly research, and several studies have examined its impact on various aspects of the electoral process IDEA (2014); Kuenzi, M., & Lambright, G. M. (2008), Norris (1995); Briebe & Bunker (2019). Electoral reform can be seen from various perspectives and different criteria have been used to measure electoral reform in literature. It is important to state that there is no blanket measurement of electoral reforms. While some studies measure it as independent of Electoral Management Body (EMB), others consider it as regulation of election financing, democracy within part, criminalization of voting (Kumar, 2023) making the registration process easier, eliminating the necessity of voting, making voting more convenient (Rigby & Springer, 2011), including compulsory voting (Franklin, 1999) and change from compulsory voting to voluntary voting (Briebe & Bunker, 2019).

Burden, Canon, Mayer, and Moynihan, (2014) in their study of unanticipated consequences of electoral reform with election laws, mobilization, and turnout, measured electoral law reform as election day registration (permission for voters to register and vote on election day) and early voting (permission for voters to cast their votes without excuse before election day).

Of all the electoral reform yardsticks that could have been used to measure reform such as independence of the EMB, gender inclusion, regulation of party financing, political party registration, and media coverage of the elections among others, this study adopts making registration process easier and make voting more convenient (Rigby & Springer, 2011) as measurement of electoral reform. However, this study prioritized the introduction of Biometric Voters Verification and Registration (BVVR) which is geared towards making voter registration easier. Mwighusa (2015) asserts that the use of biometric technologies like computers, fingerprint scanners, digital cameras, and so on is what constitutes biometric voter



registration. To capture biometric information (for example fingerprints, facial structure and so on.) of voters to establish their identity. In this study, biometric voter registration is operationalized as the method involved with capturing a qualified citizen's (18 years old or above, sound leaning, resident of the country) individual data (name, date of birth, old neighbourhood, language, address, family, photo and so on.), with biometric devices for election day verification.

Highton (1997) argues that registration requirements are often identified as factors that reduce voter turnout and contribute to the socio-economic skewness of the voting population. Investigations of electoral turnout across states track down that those with more facilitative enrollment regulations have higher turnout rates. It is anticipated that completely removing barriers to registration will increase voter participation rates by up to 10% (Ansolabehere & Konisky, 2006). (Rosenstone & Wolfinger, 1978) maintained that turnout for the 1972 presidential election in the US was roughly nine percent lower due to state registration laws. Larocca & Klemanski, (2011) argued that electoral reform centered on no-excuse absentee voting and election day registration has a significant and beneficial effect on voter turnout in their study of U.S. state election reform and presidential election turnout.

Hence, a need for the adoption of electoral law reform that includes easy registration of voters and reducing barriers to political participation as measurement or indicator of electoral reform. This study coded the presence or absence of electoral reform. The presence of electoral reform was coded 1 while the absence of electoral reform was coded 0. This reform was primarily expected to overcome the major challenges associated with the traditional voter registration and verification system. This study measured reform as the introduction of biometric voter registration backed up by law.

Incumbent

Another significant variable is whether an incumbent president is taking part in the election (Wright and Riker 1989). The presence of an incumbent (which is firmly adapted by the protected principles overseeing official re-appointment) ought to, holding other variables constant, decrease the compelling number of official competitors by adding clearness to the choices introduced to electors and by impacting the essential section of likely presidential candidates (Cox 1997). In this study, elections with incumbents running are coded 1, while elections without incumbents are coded 0.

Time and Sequencing

Concurrent versus Nonconcurrent Presidential and Legislative Elections (Jones, 1994). It is hypothesized in this study that the time and sequencing of the election would have an impact on voter turnout.

Corruption

Several studies have been done on the impact of corruption and voters turnout Simmons (2023); Lacombe, Donald J; Coats, R Morris; Shughart, William F; Karahan, Gökhan (2016); Dahlberg, Stefan; Solevid, Maria (2016); Stockemer, Daniel; LaMontagne, Bernadette; Scruggs, Lyle (2013). Corruption has a negative impact on voter turnout (Miles, 2015). Kostadinova (2009) argues that corruption reduces voter turnout in elections given that it diminishes widespread belief that citizens can have an impact on political results, which is a



key component of civic participation. Corruption erodes popular trust in government institutions (Change and Chu, 2006). Though some express optimism in the possibilities of corruption to increase voters' turnout when the public reacts to vote-buying, which is the main objective of corruption (Johnston 1983)

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index was used for this study.

Variable	Definition	Measurement	Source
Turnout	Number of Votes Over the Voting age population * 100	Continuous/Interval (0 – 100)	Institute for Democracy Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
Presidential Formula		Dummy (0 -1)	(Blais Massicotte and Dobrzynska., 1997), (Mark P. Jones, 1994)
Electoral Reform	This indicates a whether introduced reform or not	Dummy (0 -1)	Authors collation
Time and Sequencing	Concurrent and Non-concurrent elections	Dummy (0 -1)	(Mark P. Jones, 1994)
Incumbent	Incumbent competes for re-election	Dummy (0 -1)	Bunker and Navia: authors Calculation
Corruption Perception index	The Index only measures perception of corruption in the public sector	Continuous/Interval (0 -10) Perceived as less corrupt (5 -9), Perceived as more corrupt (0 -4)	Transparency International (CPI 1995 -2021)
Region	Sub-region in Africa or location in Africa	Polychotomous Variable	WorldAtlas

Table 3: Summary of list of variables included in the model.

Source: Compiled by the Author with relevant sources on the last column

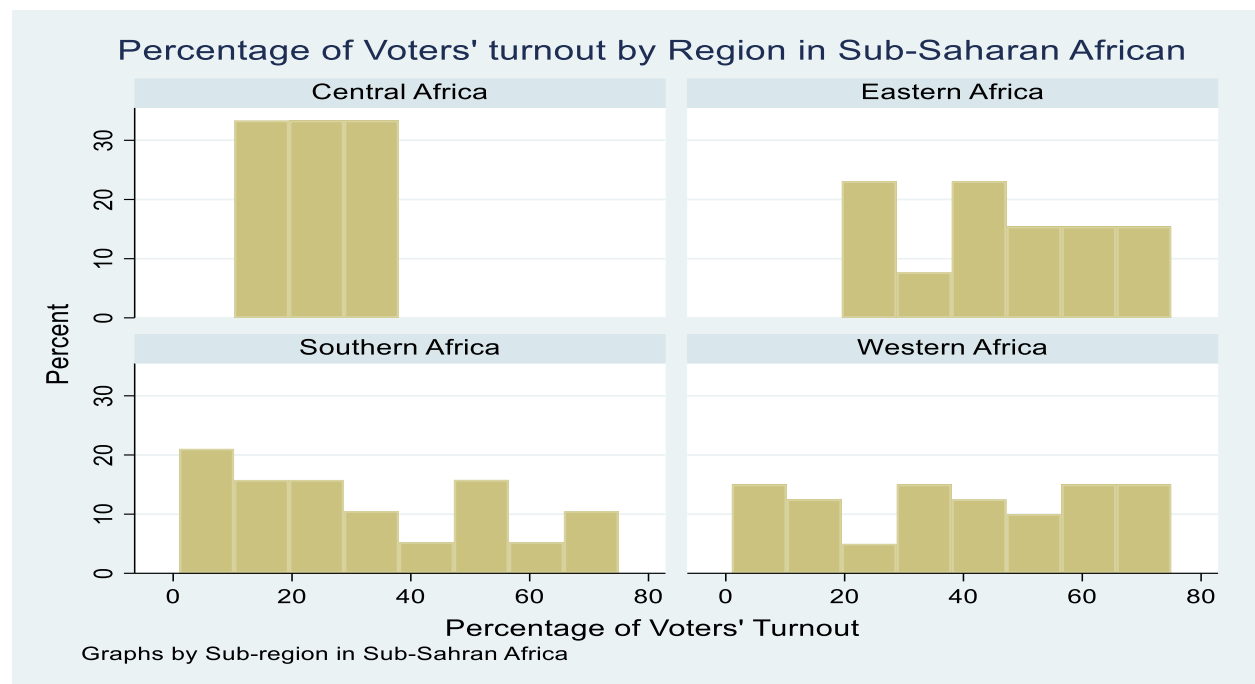


Figure 1: Percentage of Voters turnout by region in sub-Saharan Africa

Source: Output from Stata Analysis

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	St. dev.	N
Voters' turnout	1	75	38	21.8	75
President Electoral Formula	0	1	.24	.43	75
Electoral Reform	0	1	.25	.44	75
Time Sequencing	0	1	.24	.43	75
Incumbent	0	1	.68	.47	75
CPI	1	31	151	7.8	75
Region	1	4	4.1	1.3	75

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of variables included in the analysis.

Source: Compiled by the author with the aid of STATA statistical analysis

	Coefficient (Std. Error)	[From, To]	Difference
Electoral Reform	-0.46 (0.932)	[0, 1]	-0.46
Presidential Electoral Formula	-8.85 (0.442)	[0, 1]	-8.85
Time and Sequencing	-11.06 (0.052)	[0, 1]	-11.06
Incumbent	4.98(0.32)	[0, 1]	4.98
Corruption Perception Index	-0.55(0.20)	[1, 35]	18.7
Eastern Africa	25.4(0.23)		
Southern Africa	11.50(0.59)		



Western Africa	22.04(0.26)		
Adjusted R-Squared	0.1488		
N	75		

$p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 5: Predictors of Voters' turnout in Sub-Saharan African Countries (1990 – 2023)

Source: *Output of data from Stata Statistical Analysis*

ANALYSIS

Do pre-electoral law reforms have a higher voter turnout percentage than post-electoral law reforms? Appropriate bivariate inferential tests were conducted to answer the question. A difference of means test indicates that voters' turnout percentage varies significantly by the presence of electoral law reform. The voters' turnout percentage is 0.5% higher (38.1) in pre-electoral law reform than in post-electoral law reform (37.6). Then, I conducted a correlation between voters' turnout and electoral law reform and the 4 control variables using Pearson's r which is bracketed by -1 and +1. As a rough rule of thumb: $r > .8$ = very strong; $r > .6$ = strong; $r > .4$ = moderately strong; $r > .2$ = weak; r between 0 and .2 = very weak (Pollock, 2019).

Preliminary findings on correlation with significant tests reveal that there is a negative, very weak ($r = -0.0099$) and no statistically significant correlation between electoral law reform and voters' turnout. In addition, there is a negative, very weak ($r = -0.097$) correlation between the presidential electoral formula and voters' turnout, but it is not statistically significant. Relatively, there is a negative, very weak ($r = -0.16$) and no statistically significant correlation between time or sequencing and voters' turnout.

Also, there is a positive, very weak ($r = 0.11$) and no statistically significant correlation between incumbent and voters' turnout. Finally, there is a negative, very weak ($r = -0.01$) and no statistically significant correlation between the corruption perception index and voters' turnout.

Regression Results

For the empirical test, I used multivariate regression analysis. Specifically, the Ordinary Least Square regression analysis was used. This was influenced by the fact that the dependent variable is a continuous/interval variable. Also, I used the random effect, instead of fixed effect given that the research question aims to assess the overall impact of electoral law reform on voters' turnout across all the countries selected rather than in each country. Also, given that I intend to account for time-varying heterogeneity in the unbalanced panel dataset, the random effect model appears apt.

Again, as shown in Table 3, the dependent variable is voters' turnout, which is an interval variable while the key independent variable, electoral law reform, is a dummy variable. Similarly, other covariates such as presidential electoral formula, time or sequencing and



incumbent re-run are dummy variables while corruption perceptions index is an interval level variable.

From Table 6, the regression model indicates that electoral law reform, presidential electoral formula, time or sequencing and corruption perception index have negative effects on the percentage of voters' turnout except the incumbent re-run which has a positive effect. In addition, surprisingly, none of the variables is statistically significant in the multivariate model. These results match what was observed in the bivariate analyses. The findings dovetail with Rosenstone & Wolfinger, (1978) and (Ansolabehere & Konisky, 2006) whose studies revealed that the introduction of registration laws, equivalent to electoral law reform, decreased voters' participation.

Though not statistically significant, electoral law reform indicates that, on average, the post-electoral law reforms have a lower percentage of voter turnout compared to pre-electoral law reform, holding all other variables constant. Similarly, considering the impact of the covariates, the presidential electoral formula shows that, on average, majority run-off leads to decreased voter turnout compared to plurality. The same outcome shows for time or sequencing – concurrent elections result in a lower voter turnout rate compared to non-concurrent elections. The predicted difference in the corruption perception index is 18.7.

I tested for robust standard error, and the result remains the same except for one of the covariates, incumbent re-run, that changes from not statistically significant to statistically significant. Overall, the results are not in the direction expected by the theory and hypothesis, other factors might be in play on why electoral law reforms did not lead to increased voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. This indicates that electoral law reforms are not effective because of their inability to produce the change predicted. Besides, this suggests that the impacts of electoral law reforms on voter turnout in Africa could have been overstated.

Owing to the developments from the empirical analysis, I turned to qualitative data to explain the complex and multi-faceted issues that may contribute to the relationship between electoral law reforms and voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. Depressed voters, structural and socio-economic factors, voter suppression and intimidation, political culture and trusts, weak electoral institutions and lack of civic education and voters' engagement constitute some of the factors that may lead to decreased voters' turnout. For instance, Nigeria's 2023 general elections witnessed another round of political apathy. Election in Nigeria, Africa's greatest majority rule government, has been hounded by low voter turnout which has declined consistently since the 2003 general elections (Akinmurele, 2023).

Voters' intimidation and electoral violence in some parts of the states in Nigeria, such as Lagos resulted in low voter turnout. "Thugs said that anyone who didn't want to vote for the All-Progressives Congress (APC) should go back home right away" (Akinkuotu, 2023). Despite increased registration of eligible voters, the rate of turnout was 25 per cent – the lowest in the history of the country (IDEA, 2023). Violence, the poor economic situation, and citizens' distrust of elections are some of the identified reasons for the low voter turnout (John, 2023). The turnout would have been higher if the election had not been marred by problems like the late arrival of INEC officials, disenfranchisement of voters, and vote suppression (Clifford, 2023). Qualitative data from Nigeria shows that structural weakness of the Electoral Management Body, voters' suppression, and electoral violence among others constitute factors that contribute to low voter turnout in the country.



Similarly, Kenya recorded its second lowest turnout, 64.77 percent in the 2022 general elections, after the 2002 presidential elections with a record of 57.18 percent (IDEA, 2023). The lack of voter education, youth disinterest, diminished faith in the political system, poverty, and youth unemployment were all blamed for low turnout (Anami, 2022). Mr Chebukati attributed the low turnout to heavy rains in some parts of the country and insecurity, while Senate Majority Leader Kipchumba Murkomen attributed it to NASA supporters' violence and intimidation (Oluoch, 2017). Again, parallel to the Nigerian experience, low voter turnout in Kenya is traceable to voters' suppression, insecurity, and dwindling trust in the political system.

Another case in point is Uganda which recorded 59.35 percent turnout in 2021 presidential elections, the second lowest in the history of the country's multi-party politics (IDEA, 2023). Compared to the 2016 general elections when the country recorded 67.61 percent voters' turnout, there was a decrease in the last elections conducted in the country. From 72.9% in 1996 to 67.6% in 2016, voter turnout has continued to decline, with the northern and central regions experiencing the highest proportion of non-voters (Abet, 2020). According to analysts, election and vote rigging revelations have damaged the electoral process's credibility and given voters the impression that the current government's Electoral Commission (EC) cannot conduct an election. Additionally, this partially explains the high voter apathy because a significant portion of the population believes that voting is meaningless and that their vote has no bearing on the process of electing a new government.

Three weeks into the campaign, violence in elections is already showing its ugly face. On the campaign trail, two presidential candidates were detained; the protests that followed the arrests resulted in the deaths of no more than 50 people. Also, "several presidential candidates have complained to the EC about being harassed on the campaign trail by police and other agencies, but the electoral body hasn't said anything about the alleged violence or unfairness of the election" (Abet, 2020).

In sum, contrary to the hypothesis, electoral law reforms abdicate in increasing voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. Qualitative cases from Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Uganda reveal that electoral violence, voters' intimidation and suppression, lack of voters' education, depleting trust in the political system, structural vulnerability of the Electoral Management bodies, and socio-economic factors among others account for the reduction in voters' turnout in sub-Saharan African countries.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study is to conduct empirical cross-country evidence on the impact of electoral law reform on voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. Contrary to widespread speculation that electoral reform leads to increased turnout, data from 12 countries selected as cases did not support the claims that electoral law reform that includes easy registration of voters and reducing barriers to political participation leads to increased voter turnout in sub-Saharan African countries. Findings from the bivariate analysis and multivariate regression test reveal that the impact of electoral law reforms may have been overstated and time should be allowed for the reforms to have a strong footing before assessing its effectiveness in translating to increase turnout. The result of this study is in line with the findings of Ansolabehere &



Konisky (2006) which showed that the introduction of registration law decreased voters' participation.

The lack of conclusive results for the hypothesized electoral law reforms increased in voters' turnout suggests that the impact of electoral law reform may be too early to study. Thus, this hypothesis needs further investigation. The qualitative evidence suggests other variables that could have been included in the model. Future research should explore electoral law reforms and possibly look at other key indicators or measurements such as changes in party finances, fair media coverage, and independent electoral management bodies' effect on voters' turnout.

A broad conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that it might be too early to look at the impact of electoral law reforms in sub-Saharan African countries with the indicator or measurement adopted. Other key indicators such as political trust, perception of electoral integrity etc. suggested by the qualitative data may produce an explanation on why electoral law reforms led to a decrease in post-reform elections and provide expected results as hypothesized in this study. The challenges confronting voters' turnout among many others include voters' intimidation, lack of civic education, eroding trust in the political system, insecurity, and fragility of electoral management bodies. Cross-regional research would offer further opportunities to check the validity of the findings in different contexts.

Notes:

1. The 12 countries selected as cases have laws on reform as measured by the study and have conducted at least one election post-reform.

1. Note on incumbent: electoral Incumbent competes for Dummy (0–1) Bunker and Navia re-election 2015; authors' calculations.

2. I excluded Nigeria's 1993 elections and Zimbabwe's 1990 elections due to the non-availability of data on the percentage of the total on the IDEA website. Also, Nigeria's 1993 general election was annulled.

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APPENDIX 1

List of all the 25 countries that introduced biometric voters' registration in Africa.

Zimbabwe	Niger	Congo
Kenya	Liberia	Lesotho
Uganda	South Africa	Eswatini
Ghana	Zambia	Namibia
Cameroon	Tanzania	Rwanda
Angola	Botswana	Togo
Somaliland	Egypt	Sierra Leone
Libya	Angola	Senegal
Nigeria		